Invoking the Past to Mute the Present: Implications for the Epiclassic Feathered Serpent Pyramid at Xochicalco, Mexico

Invocando el pasado para silenciar el presente: implicaciones en torno a la pirámide epiclásica de la Serpiente Emplumada en Xochicalco, México

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Abstract: This paper re-examines the iconic Feathered Serpent Pyramid at the short-lived Epiclassic (AD 650-900) city of Xochicalco in the Central Highlands of Mexico in two specific contexts: Archaeological evidence concerning its location and construction stages, as well as its relationship to the city's sculptural tradition. Efforts are made to situate the pyramid in the site's chronology and to reappraise the possible meanings of the building's complex iconographic program. Striving to create an image fostering social and political cohesion amidst the inevitable divisiveness of competition for power, the monuments' designers and makers reformulated a cosmological message with foundations in an ancient Teotihuacan monument through a Maya-derived visual idiom, honoring the league of tribute paying polities while justifying the need for military order imposed by the Xochicalco state.

Keywords: Feathered Serpent Pyramid; iconography; socio-political cohesion; Xochicalco; Central Mexico; Epiclassic.

Resumen: Este ensayo reexamina la icónica Pirámide de las Serpientes Emplumadas de la ciudad epiclásica (650-900 d. C.) de Xochicalco de corta duración en el altiplano central mexicano en dos contextos: las evidencias arqueológicas alrededor de su ubicación en el sitio y las etapas constructivas, además de su relación a la tradición escultórica de la ciudad. Se esmera fijar la pirámide dentro de la cronología del sitio y revaluar los posibles significados del programa iconográfico del edificio. En el afán de crear una imagen que promoviera la unidad socio-política en un ambiente de confilictividad inevitable que surja en la rivalidad de poder, los creadores y productores de los monumentos reformularon un mensaje cosmológico basado en un monumento antiguo teotihuacano a través de un lenguaje visual de derivación maya, que honraba la liga de entidades políticas que pagaba tributo a la vez que justificaba la necesidad del orden militar impuesto por el estado de Xochicalco.

Palabras clave: Pirámide de las Serpientes Emplumadas; iconografía; cohesión socio-política; Xochicalco; México central; Epiclásico.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed [...]
W. B. Yeats, "The Second Coming"

It is perplexing how a single monument – especially an idiosyncratic one – can become a visual synecdoche of sorts for an entire city. Although it may epitomize a certain point or period, it will always mute the diversity, dynamism, and complexity that characterize any urban center past or present. Perhaps therein lies the secret: they muffle divergence for the sake of unity, particularly in situations where a widening disparity of factions threatens to pull the center apart. The Feathered Serpent Pyramid is a relatively small – within the context of Mesoamerica – pyramidal structure (Figures 1 and 2 a-b) in Xochicalco, an Epiclassic (AD 650-900) city that covered three adjoining hilltops in Central Mexico (Hirth, Hirth and Pauer 2000, 197), with residential and other constructions dotting five others (Hirth 2000, 13-17). The importance of the Xochicalco Feathered Serpent Pyramid is underscored by its location at the highest reaches of the site, protected by fortifications including ramparts, ditches, moats and walls (Hirth 1983, 261-262ff; 2000, 218ff), while points of access to the center were restricted by adjacent platforms that probably served as checkpoints (Hirth 1983, 332-336). It has long been the city's most recognized monument, despite the fact its distinctive features make it atypical rather than characteristic of the site. Ironically, it would seem that the earlier monument to which it owes its greatest debt – the Feathered Serpent Temple at Teotihuacan – was idiosyncratic in that city's architecture and also went on to become one of the most emblematic and perhaps influential monuments of the ancient metropolis.

Figure 1. View of site model of Xochicalco (photo: Debra Nagao).
A: Feathered Serpent Pyramid. B: Twin Pyramid.

Figure 2a. View of the Feathered Serpent Pyramid, Xochicalco, Mexico (photo: Debra Nagao).

Figure 2b. View of east side of Feathered Serpent Pyramid, Xochicalco, Mexico. (photo: Debra Nagao).

This is not to deny the obvious importance of either construction, but rather to reappraise what I believe was the deliberate, but selective, partial appropriation by the builders of Xochicalco to both align and set the city apart from the great Classic period metropolis of Teotihuacan. I maintain that this partial appropriation was part of a strategy that arose in the Epiclassic period, when a number of centers particularly in the Central Highlands of Mexico strove to set themselves apart from each other and from the former metropolis of Teotihuacan by seeking strikingly different visual means of expressing their identity, while drawing on ideas that formed an integral part of regional belief systems (Nagao 1989). The eclecticism apparent in large-scale or small-scale remains at centers in the Central

Highlands such as Xochicalco, Cacaxtla, Cholula, Tetlatlahuca, Tlalpizahuac,[1] and others drew on diverse local iconographic traditions expressed in non-local styles in order to avoid overt connections to a city of waning power. In other words, a number of the ideas and symbols used in the Epiclassic may be conceptually traced to the great metropolis, but they were couched in dramatically different visual terms that struck the eye and distracted the mind from their actual origins. It was a reactionary time in which creativity was perhaps valued over the standardization pervasive in much of Teotihuacan material culture.

The aim of this paper is to reassess the Xochicalco Feathered Serpent Pyramid in two specific contexts in an effort to examine it from different angles. After a brief introduction to the monument, the structure will be reevaluated first in light of archaeological evidence and then reconsidered in the context of the city's sculpture.

For years countless travelers, visitors, and scholars have noted the similarities between the monuments at Xochicalco and aspects of the styles of the Maya, Teotihuacan, the Gulf Coast, and Oaxaca.[2] However, more often than not, the assumption has been that these non-local traits were the result of trade and interaction (Litvak King 1972), as if the choices on the part of the makers of these monuments were passive entities, lacking agency and solely mirroring interactions, instead of serving as active participants making conscious and carefully constructed decisions aimed at building bridges with or diverting them from the past. The present discussion attempts to examine the connections between Xochicalco and earlier cultures and iconography in light of chronological evidence from recent decades. I would suggest that visual choices were tailored to meet the needs of a young rising city, with full awareness of the achievements of Teotihuacan, with a willingness to co-opt its aura in an effort to bolster its own status, tempered by the dangers of too close an alignment with the city which had literally ignited passions expressed in targeted destruction once the metropolis was in overt decline.

It would appear many of the ideas for the iconographic program were derived from early Teotihuacan monuments, although the visual sources or stylistic solutions were drawn primarily from more or less coeval sources in the Maya region in an effort to rephrase and perhaps even dissimulate direct connections with the metropolis long after it ceased to exert regional power and influence. The manifestations at Xochicalco were not a revival of Teotihuacan's grandeur and might, instead they demonstrate two processes. The strategy was to draw on powerful symbol systems, but to render them in an innovative way through the selective use of non-local visual styles, particularly a generalized Maya-like style. The second component was to choose Teotihuacan

1 On Tetlatlahuca, see Guevara Hernández, Contreras Martínez and Bravo Castillo (1991); on Tlalpizahuac, see Tovalín Ahumada (1998) and Tovalín Ahumada *et al.* (1992).

2 Maya style: Breton in Hirth (2000, 39); Batres, Escalona, Jiménez Moreno y Marquina cited in López Luján (1995, 24,138); Teotihuacan style: Piña Chan (1977, 31); Garza Tarazona and Palavicini Beltrán (2002); Gulf Coast style: Márquez cited in Litvak King (1971, 104); Plancarte and Navarrete cited in López Luján (1995, 24,138); Piña Chán (1989); and Oaxaca style: Orozco y Berra in López Luján (1995, 24,138); Breton in Hirth (2000, 39).

elements that already had resonance in the Maya region, where during the heyday of the metropolis, Maya rulers adopted elements of the Teotihuacan style and iconography to augment their authority (Pasztory 1978; Coggins 1983, 1988; Bell, Canuto and Sharer 2004; Braswell 2003). Although the Xochicalco planners and artists often resorted to Maya visual inspiration in their approach to image design, the overall configuration of their ideas and compositions reveals a greater adherence to Central Mexican visual and socio-political systems than those known from the Maya region, driven by a concomitant openness to innovation.

Reappraising the archaeological evidence

Archaeological evidence has shed new light on the chronology of the Feathered Serpent Pyramid. Excavations conducted by Norberto González Crespo and Silvia Garza Tarazona have revealed that the sculpture-encased pyramid visible today pertains to a late phase of the structure. Archaeologists uncovered two earlier levels of a much smaller room, built on the ground level of the Main Plaza and raised on a low platform (González Crespo *et al.* 2008, 131),[3] lacking sculptural decoration, and completely covered by later construction (González Crespo *et al.* 1993-1994, 166, fig. 219). The early phases bear simple architectural articulation with an elongated *talud* and a relatively squat *tablero*, decorated simply with niche-like spaces with overlapping panels. The treatment of the niche like articulation of the earliest phase wall flanking an entrance with two pillars leading to a small room consists of a complex overlapping of six different planes (Figure 3): 1) innermost vertical plane, 2) wide horizontal band below; 3) lateral panels, 4) wide horizontal capping panel, 5) lateral panels, 6) horizontal capping panel. This distinctive treatment is unique to Xochicalco, although reminiscent of the use of overlapping panels creating shallow, albeit simpler niche-like spaces at Cacaxtla (López de Molina and Molina Feal 1980, 11, fig. 3), deeper niches at El Tajín, the use of double inverted U-shaped cornices

Figure 3. Detail of Stage 1, Feathered Serpent Pyramid, Xochicalco, Mexico (photo: Debra Nagao).

3 According to Piña Chan (1989, 14) Sáenz already detected these two earlier structures, although he was not able to uncover them at that time.

at Monte Albán, and the wall articulation of platforms at Chichén Itzá. The inner room contained a low free-standing platform in the center, but no evidence of permanent sculpture.

Figure 4. Detail of Stage 2, Feathered Serpent Pyramid, Xochicalco, Mexico (photo: Debra Nagao).

The second phase expansion of the Feathered Serpent Pyramid (González Crespo *et al.* 1993-1994, 166, fig. 219) also pertains to a wall flanking the entrance with two pillars to an inner space, with a slightly taller, and thereby more imposing façade. In the second stage, the niche is slightly simpler, displaying four planes (Figure 4): 1) innermost vertical plane, 2) wide horizontal band below; 3) lateral and horizontal capping panel, 4) prominent horizontal panel below. Curiously, the wide horizontal plane below the niche-like configuration is the feature least commonly employed at other sites, and is the feature most prominently retained between the first and second phases, perhaps the result of an effort to enhance its distinctive identity. The simplicity of these two phases evokes an iconoclasm that contrasts the *horror vacui* of the final phase. The roof of this earlier stage was carefully removed and a dedicatory offering of an adolescent with a dog was buried in the fill, where a charred wood fragment was dated to AD 635-669 (González Crespo *et al.* 2008, 131-132).

The third construction phase, the structure visible today, was built on a significantly larger scale, completely encasing earlier construction phases. Now the building consisted of a pyramidal platform with stairs leading up to a more spacious inner sanctum. As far as is known, the elaborate sculptural program was integral to the original conception of this phase of the structure. In contrast to the plain walls of the earlier stages, the last stage

was completely covered with a carefully thought-out, bold figurative program combining repetition and subtle differentiation, described in greater detail in the following section. Evidence suggests a change in the polychromy that originally covered the structure. Peñafiel (1890, Plates Volume, pl. 208; Text Volume, 44-45) reproduced a color reconstruction of the side of the stairway where traces of green, yellow, and red were still visible in the nineteenth century, while plates 209 and 210 show reconstructions of the front and side of the pyramid in a monochrome red, suggesting the monument was not solely from the final phase of the city, but that it must have been in use for some time.

Given the relatively short duration of the city, whose occupation has been dated to AD 650 to 900 (Hirth 2000), the Feathered Serpent Pyramid visible today was not built early in the sequence of the city's architecture. The earliest stage has been dated to ca. AD 635-669 (González Crespo *et al.* 2008).[4] Presumably the simpler earlier phases could have been short-lived, given the relatively minor changes in dimensions and iconographic program. However, the complete shift in architectural decoration and the complexity of the program suggest a completely new iconographic approach, modifications presumably made in response to evolving needs and a degree of awareness of developments at other centers esteemed for their monumental arts. Unlike the use of a pyramidal platform completely clad in sculpture at an early date at Teotihuacan, only later to be partially masked by a plainer structure, at Xochicalco the earliest phases had spare decoration, while the final phases bore a detailed iconographic program alluding to stylistic and iconographic features of other polities of known power, past and present.

Is it possible to suggest an approximate date for the last phase of the Feathered Serpent Pyramid at Xochicalco? Before addressing this highly conjectural proposition, it is worth noting an often overlooked aspect of its archaeological context: the Feathered Serpent Pyramid was mirrored by its twin known as the Pirámide Gemela to the north, which was only recently excavated and never reconstructed. The two structures have approximately the same dimensions, suggesting a similar date, but the northern structure was apparently decorated entirely with mural painting (Garza Tarazona and Palavicini Beltrán 1993-1994, 297; González Crespo *et al.* 1993-1994, 172-174), although only fragments have survived. Excavators reported two rooms with mural painting on interiors, where they collected 400 painted stones decorated with phytomorphic and zoomorphic motifs, such as a bird talon, as well as jade beads. There they excavated masks, skeletal jaguar sculptures, shells, travertine sculptures with yellow and green pigment on stucco (González Crespo *et al.* 1993-1994, 174). Skeletal or emaciated jaguar sculptures are a distinctive sculptural type developed at Xochicalco (Figure 5), also found at other locations in the city such as Structure A and in a room in the southeast corner of the Acropolis (González Crespo *et al.* 1993-1994). The Twin Pyramid might have been connected with emaciated jaguar iconography in contrast to the feathered serpent imagery of the pyramid beside it, although

4 Given the massive amount of manpower needed to level the upper reaches of the city's central hills (Garza Tarazona and González Crespo 2004), a slightly later date would not seem out of order.

it is unclear if jaguars were rendered in the painted fragments from the pyramid. Its construction was certainly less labor-intensive than that of its painted relief-encased twin. A radiocarbon date from a charred beam from when the building was burned and covered by a later stage yielded a date of AD 664-723 (González Crespo *et al.* 2008, 133). Could the twin pyramid have manifested another religious or political faction, or a system of dual leadership or sharing the power invested in the authority implied by the Feathered Serpent Pyramid?

Figure 5. Emaciated jaguar sculpture, Xochicalco, Mexico (photo: Debra Nagao).

Returning to proposing an approximate date for the Feathered Serpent Pyramid, the Epiclassic has been characterized as a time of the widespread movement of people, artifacts, and ideas following the decline of Teotihuacan (Diehl and Berlo 1989). The people could have been elites or specialists (such as priests, artists, merchants, women forging marriage alliances), or other individuals who would have had varying degrees of visual acumen in remembering what they saw, accompanied in some cases by the manual dexterity to visually or verbally reproduce their recollections. A significant corpus of monuments and artifacts from Xochicalco suggest this process of transmission by evoking the idea of objects known from other areas, but that lack significant details to bear a sufficiently strong resemblance suggesting imported pieces. For example, lapidary figures and masks have elicited comparisons with Teotihuacan and Mezcala materials,[5] while lapidary plaques have been compared to or even been identified as Maya in origin,[6] while

5 Some masks reproduce Teotihuacan and Mezcala proportions and treatment might be actual pieces from those areas that could well have been brought to Xochicalco as portable remains. However, despite some evidence of lapidary workshops in Teotihuacan (Turner 1992), relatively little is understood whether the raw materials were always transported to central workshops for production or whether lapidary masks and figurines may have been produced at diverse locations. Sáenz (1961; 1962; 1966) reported Teotihuacan-style *tecalli* (onyx) masks at Xochicalco and roughly thirteen masks and thirty-nine fragments were uncovered in recent excavations (Garza Tarazona and Palavicini Beltrán 1993-1994, 118, 120, 122, 124, 128ff, 140-141, 150, 154, 157-159, 170-171, 174, 179-181), although the styles are not specified (Nagao 2014, 254ff, Appendix D, Table 5).

6 This artifact category is ubiquitous in the Maya region, which is assumed to be the place of origin, while relatively limited examples found in the Central Highlands appear to be localized versions emulating Maya finery. Sáenz found lapidary pendant plaques at Xochicalco in dedicatory offerings in the

another corpus of ceramic pieces are reminiscent of censer bases known from the Maya region, although significant deviations in iconographic details means they could never be mistaken for pieces of Maya provenance.[7] It would appear that Xochicalco was open to the idea of casting a wide net in looking for visual solutions to the pressing problem of creating distinctive pieces for public display and public and/or private ritual. Although it might have involved the presence of non-local artists, the final products are sufficiently unlike the original models to suggest the actual presence of foreign artists was not necessarily the case.

Given that the Xochicalco Feathered Serpent Pyramid has often been cited as possessing Maya, Teotihuacan, Oaxaca, and Veracruz features, I selected a few distinctive traits from the pyramid that are also known from Maya monuments in an effort to pin down the date of this final phase as a sort of trial or pilot test. I selected the Trapeze-and-Ray sign with or without Tlaloc features, the Balloon Headdress, and the Serpent maw headdress with or without the Trapeze-and-Ray sign. The reason I chose these features is that although a version of them appears at Teotihuacan, the form of the Trapeze-and-Ray sign generally conforms to the formal type and functional context seen in the Maya region and not at Teotihuacan. At Teotihuacan the pointed ray overlaps the trapeze form and is always shown frontally, whereas in the Maya region artists played with the form, sometimes interlacing the trapeze and ray, employing a blunt ray, or showing the form in profile. As for function, at Teotihuacan the sign was used prominently across media (on frescoes, ceramics, figurines, and painted trumpet shells), always in conjunction with other signs, particularly the Reptile's Eye glyph and water or fire signs (Winning 1987, II, 25-28), whereas in the Maya region it most often served a crowning function in headdresses, while in post-Teotihuacan contexts in the Central Highlands it was most often used as either a headdress element or a glyph. These dates of its appearance in Maya monuments cluster from the mid-seventh to mid-eighth century.[8] Further support may be found in what Proskouriakoff (1974, 175ff) refers to

Feathered Serpent Pyramid, Structure A and Structure C (Nagao 2014, 255-261; Appendix D Table 7), while those excavated by González Crespo and Garza Tarazona (González Crespo *et al.* 1993-1994, 118, 121-124, 126, 128-149, 154, 163-171, 173-175, 181) were not from discrete ritual deposits, but were the detritus of the violence of the city's end.

7 For this unpublished material see González Crespo *et al.* (1993-1994) and Nagao (2014, 280-282, Appendix D, Table 11; figs. 288 a-d).

8 This is not an exhaustive list of the appearance of these traits, rather a focused selection of where they appear primarily in the Usumacinta Region, but also taking into account Copán given the prevalence of macaw iconography and its recurrence at Xochicalco. Interlaced Trapeze-and-Ray Sign with or without Tlaloc features: Copán Stela 6 (AD 682) and Hieroglyphic Stairway (ca. AD 750); Yaxchilán Lintel 24 (AD 710; with Tlaloc-like features) and Lintel 8 (AD 755; with Tlaloc-like features); Yaxchilán Lintel 17 (ca. AD 750; in woman's headdress). Balloon Headdress with warrior iconography: Piedras Negras: a) Panel 4 (AD 659; no T-R); b) Stela 35 (AD 662; no T-R); c) Stela 9 (AD 736; with blunt overlapping T-R, inverted Reptile's Eye, owl); Yaxchilán Lintel 25 (AD 725; with Tlaloc and T-R); Aguateca Stela 2 (AD 736; with Tlaloc, profile overlapping blunt T-R), Dos Pilas Stela 16 (AD 736 with Tlaloc, profile overlapping blunt T-R). Serpent maw headdress with bifurcated tongue with warrior garb: Piedras Negras Stela 7 (AD 721 with blunt overlapping T-R), Stela 26 (SD 678, no T-R), Stela 31 (ca. AD 637). On these costume features, see Stone (1985) and Coggins (1983).

as Nebaj-type plaques – generally Late Classic (AD 600-800; Schele and Miller 1986, 78) – that depict figures seated with face in profile that offer the closest parallels to the cross-legged figure repeated on the lower *talud* of the Xochicalco Feathered Serpent Pyramid.[9] The radiocarbon dates for the fill covering Stage 2 (AD 635-669) and the Twin Pyramid (AD 664-723) suggests the pyramidal structure could have been built as early as the late seventh century. However, if we assume the Xochicalco forms postdated the Maya examples and were intentional allusions to Maya imagery, then a mid-eighth to ninth century date seems in order for the elaborate sculptural and painting program of the Feathered Serpent Pyramid, placing the monument relatively late in the city's chronology.

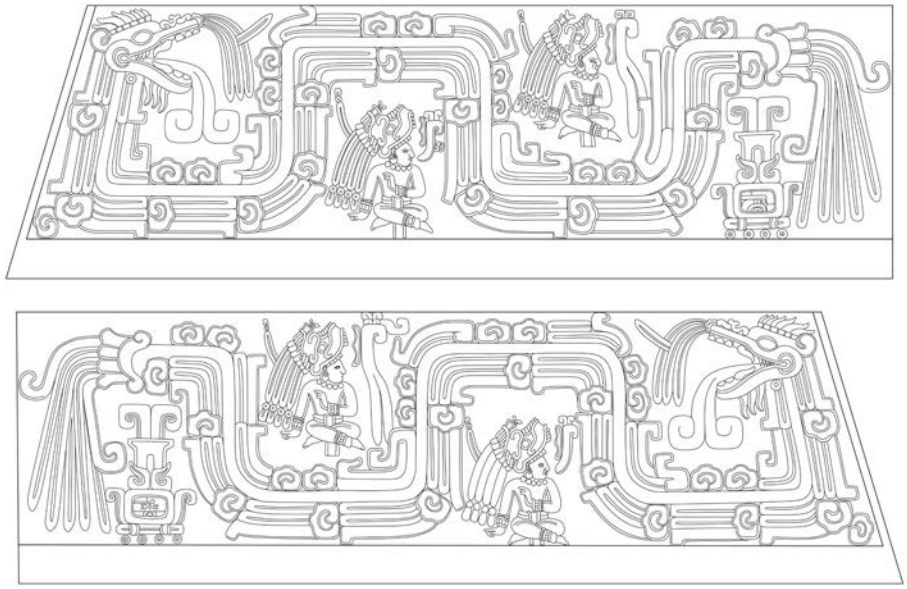

Figure 6. Drawing of the lower *talud* on north side of the Feathered Serpent Pyramid, Xochicalco, from Antonio Peñafiel's *Monumentos del arte mexicano antiguo* (1890) (drawing: Elbis Domínguez).

The Feathered Serpent Pyramid at Xochicalco would appear to have been a long-lived monument given the evidence of two prior construction stages along with the shift from polychromy to monochromy, which contrasts with the evidence of a single earlier construction phase for the twin pyramid. Significantly, despite the massive evidence

9 Although this repetition of seated figures has been compared to the seated rulers portrayed posthumously on Copán Altar Q (AD 776; O'Neil 2012; 107-109) going back to Escalona Ramos 1952-53 (cited in Litvak King 1972, 63) if not earlier, a closer parallel can be found in portable greenstone plaques from the Maya region, the most abundant collection is from the Sacred Cenote at Chichén Itzá and studied by Proskouriakoff (1974).

of the violent destruction that led to the city's abandonment (González Crespo *et al*. 1993-1994, 51),[10] the Feathered Serpent Pyramid was apparently not the target of the attackers' rage.

Reconsidering the Feathered Serpent Pyramid in the context of Xochicalco sculpture

This section explores aspects of the iconographic program of the Feathered Serpent Pyramid at Xochicalco within the context of the city's sculpture. The program consists of three tiers covering all four sides of the monument: the long sloping *talud* at the base, and narrow rectangular *tablero* panel, and the upper *talud* (Figure 2). Discussion focuses on reading the monument from the foundations upward by focusing primarily on the repeated components of the north, east, and south sides of the monument. Less attention will be given to the west (front) side of the monument, which includes additional glyphic details that Morante (1994) has persuasively argued record a calendrical change, although Smith (2000b, 67-68) has read the glyphic imagery in terms of warfare and power as a record of a tribute payment made by the a local lord, interpretations which are not necessarily incompatible.[11] Only general comments can be offered concerning the upper *talud*, given the fragmentary nature of what has survived.

Discussion of some general features of sculptural innovation at Xochicalco can provide a better understanding of forces that may have come into play in the city's creation of a public image. In an overview of the known corpus of sculpture at Xochicalco, what is most striking is the diversity of types and styles of sculpture, in contrast to the standardization that prevailed at Teotihuacan and the variations on a theme, so to speak, known from Maya cities, where diverse Maya styles served as hallmarks identifying Southern Maya Lowland city states. Three groups predominate in the Xochicalco corpus: 1) the smallest number of strongly derivative sculptural forms apparently inspired by non-local sources in which the allusion to other sources retains a relatively close adherence the original (e.g. the large macaw head sculpture; the Huehueteotl;[12] Lord Serpent Helmet; and the Red Lord [Figure 7]); 2) an experimental group that displays greater innovation, diversity, and varied sources recombining stylistic and iconographic details into new configurations suggesting the exploratory path leading

10 Archaeologists estimated that 90 percent of the archaeological material from excavations in the 1980s and 1990s was found on the floors of rooms and patios stemming from the city's violent destruction (González Crespo *et al.* 1993-1994, 51).

11 Xochicalco's astronomical sophistication is reinforced by the striking effects visible in the Observatory, marking the zenith passage of the sun and summer solstice, significant dates in the agricultural cycle (Santos Ramírez 2015), while serving to calculate leap years based on visual phenomena (Morante 1994).

12 The Huehueteotl that Saenz (1964a, 69-70) found in Structure A in a pit that contained four of the fragments of the Xochicalco stelae. It might be a Teotihuacan heirloom given its similar proportions, dimensions and iconography to a fairly standardized type at Teotihuacan. In contrast, three other Huehueteotl sculptures from Xochicalco are markedly rudimentary and schematic in carving (Sáenz 1962, 46-47, photo 27; Smith and Hirth 2000, II, 36ff).

to the final stage (e.g. blocky standing figure with glyph; sacrificial stone; elegant male torso; terracotta sculpture; skeletal jaguars with tongues sticking out; lapidary figurines and masks [Figures 5, 8]); 3) a discrete category that I would term the final developed state style perhaps relatively late in the sequence (e.g. the Feathered Serpent Pyramid; the three stelae; the four-glyph slab; the two-glyph stela; the 3-Rabbit stone [Figure 9]), visually dominated by glyphs surrounded by wide frames or cartouches. The important point to bear in mind is that despite the likelihood of the temporal overlapping of these three types, the state style (classification 3) arose as a discrete category contrasting the first two categories in the city's efforts to create a visual image to set itself apart from other polities, and in all likelihood would have corresponded to the latest stage.

Figure 7. Composite image of Xochicalco sculpture category 1: a) Macaw, b) Huehueteotl, c) Lord Serpent Helmet, d) Red Lord (photos: Debra Nagao).

Figure 8. Composite image of Xochicalco sculpture category 2: a) elegant male torso, b) blocky stone figure with glyphs (photos: Debra Nagao).

Figure 9. Composite image of Xochicalco sculpture category 3: a) Stela 1, and b) Four-Glyph Slab (photos: Debra Nagao).

Lower talud

The Feathered Serpent. The most prominent feature of the lower *talud* is the body of eight undulating feathered serpents (Figure 6) that structure space and frame ten seated human figures along with six "9-Reptile's Eye" glyphs. The use of the feathered serpent to define space is amply known at Teotihuacan above all on the Feathered Serpent Temple (Figure 10), the most spectacular and explicit monument in its honor at the ancient metropolis with the creatures' three-dimensional heads on the balustrade, heads and headdresses depicting another creature, interpreted as *cipactli* (Sugiyama 2005, 60, 70) or as a war-serpent headdress (Taube 1992) covering the *tablero* with its undulating bas-relief body framing a watery realm with shells, and a feathered serpent in profile in bas-relief in the narrow *talud*. It also frames stairways (near Quetzalpapalotl Palace, beneath enormous feline heads), painted on shrines (Tetitla), and as borders and frames in mural painting (Sugiyama 1988). In smaller scale or portable arts, the feathered serpent is relegated to headdresses and does not seem to be part of the corpus of accepted or customary representation. The creature plays a similar space-defining role in other parts of Mesoamerica when it used on balustrades, serpent columns or in other space-framing roles at Xochicalco and in the Maya region at Chichén Itzá, Uxmal, and Mayapán. Although the feathered serpent went on to appear in later contexts in Classic period Maya monuments, it is most often rendered as a headdress and less often as a full-length creature in militaristic and rulership contests (Taube 1992).

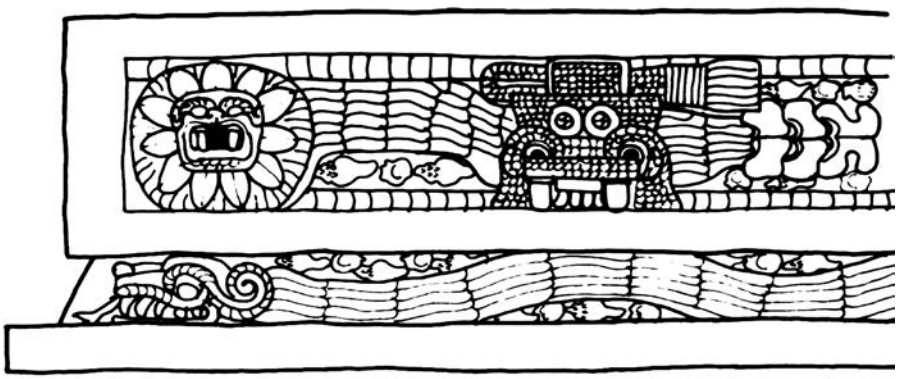

Figure 10. Drawing of detail of Feathered Serpent Temple, Teotihuacan (Linda Schele Drawings Collection, http://research.famsi.org/uploads/schele/hires/10/IMG0063.jpg).

Clearly, the idea of the feathered serpent originated at Teotihuacan, but the version at Xochicalco departs from the Teotihuacan prototype which was characterized by its "'bird eyes,' curling snout, wide mouth with [series of] backward curling fangs (without incisors or molars), compact bifurcated tongue, eyebrow with curled up end, feathered body and tail rattles" (Sugiyama 2005, 60). Although at Xochicalco it does display an eyebrow with curled up end, wide mouth and curling snout, it departs from the original idea in numerous ways. Instead it bears a stronger resemblance to *verbal descriptions* (rather than the *stylistic treatment* of visual details) of Maya versions, distinguished from the Teotihuacan prototype by the small beard, the long bifurcated tongue, and the elegant line of the long fang beside a neat row of smaller teeth perhaps indicating the snake's dentary (Taube 1992, 61, 62, 64). Diverging from both prototypes is the Xochicalco treatment of the curling snout as if a frontal roll-out of two sides of the curling snout extended over the serpent's profile, small molars, and additional plumes dangling from the snout. Although in the Maya region the feathered serpent is most frequently rendered as a helmet or headdress when in conjunction with human figures, otherwise standing on its own as architectural elements, it usually lacks a tail rattle. In the rare cases where a rattle is present, it adopts an almost trilobe shape (Taube 1992, 64), which in the case of Xochicalco is replaced by a lavishly plumed tail, and forms that vaguely recall the trilobe, but treated with other details that suggest it is the cross section of a shell decorating the creature's body. In contrast, the feathered serpent at Teotihuacan is clearly a creature with a rattlesnake tail and even when used as an architectural ornament, the rattler is prominent.

Despite the lack of coincidence in visual details between the Xochicalco and Teotihuacan serpent, I would still maintain that Xochicalco's conceptual source was Teotihuacan, given the juxtaposition of the full-length feathered serpent, the presence of the *cipactli* headdress and shells nearby, although here they are attached to the serpent's body. However, at Xochicalco, the *cipactli* headdress does not appear as a symbol on

its own, but rather is worn by the seated human figures on the lower *talud*. As for the significance of the feathered serpent, López Austin, López Luján and Sugiyama (1991) emphasized the feathered serpent as a creature of cosmological significance as the original bearer of time and the creature that defined space. This use of the feathered serpent to refer to the cosmological origins of time and space would have served to bolster Xochicalco's foundational role in maintaining cosmic order. However, Sugiyama's (2005, 73, 84) later identification of the complex at Teotihuacan as evidence of militarism and the sacrificial complex associated with the Feathered Serpent Pyramid would seem to have more limited applicability, given the absence of a major sacrificial complex at Xochicalco. Only three deposits at the Xochicalco Feathered Serpent Pyramid contained human bones believed to pertain to dedicatory deposits, a far cry from the massive burial of sacrificial victims at the homonymous structure in Teotihuacan.[13]

Seated Human Figures. The ten human figures (Figure 6) framed by the body of the feathered serpents are rendered in a standardized seated cross-legged pose, head in profile, body shown frontally, with one hand delicately poised in front of the chest and the other as if pointing backwards, to one side of the body, in a slight departure from its presumed Maya model. Whereas at Teotihuacan the body of human figures are usually covered with elaborate attire, at Xochicalco much of their bodies is exposed; they all wear the same costume: an elaborate headdress, simple round ear ornament, string of large beads, wristlets and anklets, and simple loincloth. They carry no weapons and insignia. All the figures face toward the west, the front of the building, while on the back side, the figures face away from the center, two northward and two southward. Despite their standardized pose and dimensions the figures' profiles and details (e.g. hands and feet) vary, perhaps more an indication of the skill of the carver than a bearer of meaning (Nagao 2014, 454-457, figs. 181-185, 187).[14] In contrast to the figures on the upper *talud*, the seated figures on the lower *talud* lack weapons and instead evoke the image of high rank or rulership based on their headdress, ornaments, and the frontal depiction of the body, reserved for deities at Teotihuacan (Kubler 1967; Pasztory 1976) and often for individuals of high status among the Maya (Proskouriakoff 1950). This idea is reinforced by their similarities with Maya imagery on portable greenstone plaques and pendants (Proskouriakoff 1974), and also painted on cylindrical vessels (Robicsek and Hales 1981) and occasionally on monuments (e.g. engraved stone from Bonampak

13 On these deposits, see González Crespo *et al.* (1993-1994, 168, 169); Melgar Tisoc (2007, 84X-86S); Sáenz (1963, 1964b).

14 Clearly the monument was carefully designed and laid out. However, in light of the standardization of body and insignia it is unclear whether their diverse physiognomies are more telling of the hand of the carver or the result of a deliberate attempt to distinguish between the facial features of the figures (Nagao 2014, fig. 187). A ceramic plaque described as depicting a 'Maya style' individual with similar attire, associated with a non-flaming (9?) Reptile's Eye glyph and a different headdress were also reported from Xochicalco (González Crespo *et al.* 1995, 236), but instead of serving as a model, it is more likely a commemorative piece alluding to the Feathered Serpent Pyramid.

in Coe 1993, 106, fig. 71), where rulers are often depicted in elaborate garb and are identified by hieroglyphic inscriptions. However, it is important to underscore that the seated figures merely evoke those of Maya portable artifacts, but comparable poses and iconographic details are absent, for the headdresses and insignia on Maya pieces differ from those worn by the seated figures on the lower *talud* at Xochicalco.

The Headdress. Although some scholars have referred to the creature in the headdress worn by the seated figures as feathered serpents (Piña Chan 1977, 31; Smith and Hirth 2000, 64), López Luján (1995, 57) identified it as an earth monster or *cipactli*, an interpretation that I concur with (Figure 6). Clearly the head on the headdress and that of the feathered serpent are different creatures. The headdress lacks a lower jaw, completely lacks fangs, and has a stubby snout instead of an elongated one. A neat row of teeth edges the wearer's head and a scroll over the eye unlike that over the eye of the feathered serpent. More importantly, the head of the headdress wears another diminutive headdress, just as the element identified as a headdress on the Teotihuacan Feathered Serpent Temple. At Teotihuacan the headdress has "a small trapezoid above a larger trapezoid and a large knot with feathers" suggested to have calendrical symbolic meanings (Sugiyama 2005, 71), whereas at Xochicalco the headdress most closely resembles the symbol for bundle end and smoke crowning the large Reptile's Eye glyphs alternating between the seated figures, but here rendered as a miniature headdress.[15] Although the headdress appears on its own without a wearer, Sugiyama (2005, 73) has identified the presence of the Primordial Crocodile or *cipactli* headdress as a symbol of creation and divine authority. Despite the formal ties (e.g. pose, attire, mat sign in headdress cf. Piedras Negras Stela 8) that seem to link the seated human figures to the Maya region, the symbolism of the feathered serpent headdress in the Southern Maya Lowlands tends to occur in overt contexts of militarism showing the ruler as courageous warrior (Taube 1992; Stone 1985). The absence of overt warrior symbolism in conjunction with these figures at Xochicalco suggests the allusion is instead to Teotihuacan's notion of divine authority and not to the military might of specific rulers as in the Maya region. Furthermore, the allusion to primordial or mythical origins through the earth monster or *cipactli* headdress and the feathered serpent support the idea that the *talud* or base of the monument refers to the foundations or origins of power with roots in the early imagery of the Feathered Serpent Temple at Teotihuacan. In this scheme, the seated figures might signify ancestors or members of a dynasty, whether real or imaginary, to strengthen social unity and state power through the reification of the authority and rulership embodied in the feathered serpent bedecked with shells and the seated figures crowned with *cipactli* headdresses. The juxtaposition was ultimately a veiled allusion to the original Feathered Serpent Temple at Teotihuacan where the

15 The shape of the headdress element that recalls the end of a smoking bundle also resembles a type of 'breath' or 'wind' earspool (Taube 2005, 45) worn by figures on Maya monuments. The form also resembles the glyph that Caso (1967, 175, fig. 11) has identified as the Xi glyph, which in later times was identified with the tail of the fire serpent, although Caso proposes that it might be equivalent to the calendrical glyph 1 Dog given its association with Xiuhtecuhtli, the Fire God.

feathered serpent swam amidst shells with *cipactli* headdresses affixed to its body. The addition to this composition at Xochicalco is the smoking 9-Reptile's Eye glyph.

9-Reptile's Eye Glyph. Despite minor variations, six 9 Reptile's Eye glyphs are rendered in a cartouche topped by two scrolls or volutes probably intended to evoke fire (Figure 6). The end of a shaft with a slightly wider, straight-edged termination (perhaps an everted trapezoid that might have been the end of the bundle of wood for lightning new fire, (cf. Winning 1987, II, 22, fig. 23c), topped by two scrolls that have been interpreted as smoke, while the cartouche has a volute on each side forming a boat-like container or frame. According to Caso (1967, 143), in 1922 Heinrich Beyer identified this glyph on the Iztapaluca plaque as "Reptile's Eye," although he also noted that Eduard Seler had earlier suggested it represented the Rain glyph. Its meaning has continued to be a matter of dispute, whether as a butterfly with associated flower and bird symbolism tied to Tlaloc or the Storm God and destruction by a rain of fire (Sejourné in Langley 1986, 280), or more directly as the eye of *cipactli*, the earth monster, with earth and fertility connotations, although in the case of 7-Reptile's Eye it may be specifically connected to year bundles and new fire ceremonies (Winning 1987, II, 75, 77). Largely based on the reiteration of the glyph on the Feathered Serpent Pyramid at Xochicalco, Caso (1967, 161, 164) identified 9-Reptile's Eye as the birth date and calendrical name of Quetzalcoatl, the Feathered Serpent, while Smith (2000b; 65, 85) has interpreted it as the personal name for the human figure seated nearby, despite the larger number of figures than glyphs. The repetition of the 9-Reptile's Eye glyph, the absence of other glyphic details to distinguish the seated figures, along with the lack of elite burials and depictions from the ceremonial-administrative core of the city would seem to contravene the idea that the monument was built to commemorate an individual ruler. Instead the relatively anonymous repetition would seem to suggest the idea that authority and rulership in general were the subject matter of the prominent base of this monument.

The Reptile's Eye glyph is recurrent at Teotihuacan, known only rarely from mural painting and more commonly found in ceramics (Winning 1987, II, 73, 76) that might have facilitated its transmission. It is one of the symbols that persists from the Classic period into the Epiclassic and Early Postclassic, only to disappear after that time (Winning 1987, II, 77-78). However, the Reptile's Eye is adopted in a small number of contexts without numerical coefficients in the Maya region (e.g. Palenque sarcophagus lid, Piedras Negras Stela 9) that suggest it might have had a different meaning.[16] At Teotihuacan the Reptile's Eye glyph generally appears without numerical coefficients, whereas in contexts outside the metropolis, it is often accompanied by the numbers 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, or 12, suggesting the possibility of different meanings. The combination 9 Reptile's Eye appears most often at Xochicalco: six times on the Feathered Serpent Pyramid and on the so-called

16 At Palenque the Reptile's Eye appears in the band below the ancestors to indicate earth, while at Piedras Negras it appears upside down on a balloon headdress as if misunderstood and used primarily for its non-local origin.

Two-Glyph Stela. It is also depicted as a fiery glyph at Cacaxtla, on the north door mural of Building A. However, there it does not appear in conjunction with the feathered serpent,[17] but instead with a jaguar-pelt clad warrior figure carrying a bundle of spears dripping oversized water droplets and standing on a feline serpent. The fiery component is a recurrent context for both 7 Reptile's Eye and 9 Reptile's Eye at Xochicalco, but the other variable aspects suggest meanings might have differed depending on context. Perhaps more important for the planners and makers of the Feathered Serpent Pyramid at Xochicalco was the prominent deployment of glyphs on the monument, which distinguished it from its Teotihuacan prototype as part of a program to set itself apart from other cities. A discrete body of monuments from Xochicalco bears glyphs in cartouches, which are the city's most distinctive monuments. They stand in contrast to the diversity and variability of other sculptures mentioned above as part of categories 1 and 2 and seem to attest to efforts to devise distinctive visual systems that served to identify the city and set it apart from other centers of the time.

Lower tablero

Seated Human Figures. The relatively small *tablero* surmounting the prominent *talud* base is covered with a series of twenty (probably originally twenty-four) seated male figures shown with head in profile, body displayed frontally, and one hand resting on his thigh while the other grasps a triangular bag (probably originally twenty) or a large globular container with a thick handle (probably originally four, all on the back side of the monument) (Figure 11). Like the figures on the lower *talud*, they wear wristlets and a loincloth, but their headdress is simpler than the *cipactli* headdress discussed above. Their neck ornaments are a pendant on a cord that might represent greenstone plaques of the type actually found at the site. The headdress consists of a headband projecting over the forehead, crowned by a simple interlaced Trapeze-and-Ray sign and a modest crest of plumes. The figure also has a goggle around the eye and simple straight bars in the earlobe. A speech scroll generally appears in front of the figure's mouth.

With the exception of the four figures carrying squat globular vessels, the others hold triangular bags and have a glyph consisting of a tooth-lined human mouth consuming a quadripartite disk. Hirth (1989) has convincingly proposed linguistic meanings for the glyph as tribute collection with a variable element above it that he identifies as place names of subjugated polities. On the back of the monument, four seated figures are associated with containers identified as pulque vessels (Rivas Castro 1993), although the figures are otherwise identical in attire and pose to the others with triangular bags; the four individuals are accompanied by glyphs in cartouches with numerical coefficients (3 Reed, 5 Death, 6 Movement or Grass, 13 Monkey), which Smith (2000b, 72) identifies as dates in the ritual calendar. These figures are also associated with glyphs that probably

17 An eagle-clad figure stands on the feathered serpent in the south door mural shown carrying a ceremonial bar, and associated with an entirely different glyph: 13 Flint.

Figure 11. Detail of figure on the *tablero*, Feathered Serpent Pyramid, Xochicalco (photo: Debra Nagao).

indicate place names, although they lack the mouth-quadripartite disk associated with the figures with the triangular bags, perhaps copal bags or containers for ritual kits. The shift between triangular bags and pulque vessels in the central panels on the back of the monument might be intended to indicate a distinction between representatives of polities that participated in tribute payments and others connected in some way to pulque.[18] Curiously the four figures could have coincided with the idea of the quadripartite division of the year discussed below and a corresponding schedule of tribute or ritual obligations.

Trapeze-and-Ray (Year Sign) Headdress. Perhaps the most significant feature of these figures is the headdress (Figure 11), given that the form of the trapeze and ray diverges from the version known at Teotihuacan, and instead coincides with representations devised by Maya artists. At Teotihuacan, the imbricated Trapeze-and-Ray is formed by the ray overlapping the trapeze or else by the trapeze overlapping the ray (Winning 1987, II, 27ff), whereas in the Maya region, artists rendered the spatially more complex interlaced trapeze and ray form suggested to depict an astronomical device that could in fact have been worn as a headdress (Adrian Digby cited in Winning 1987, II, 27). Digby proposes the device could have been used to make solar observations to divide the year into four equal parts of 91 days, which in turn could be subdivided into seven periods of

18 Although the consumption of the fermented beverage was an important part of ritual practice, sixteenth-century tribute lists such as the Codex Mendoza do not mention it as a commodity paid in tribute, perhaps as a result of its perishable nature.

13-days (Rice 2007: 51). These periods could have been of use not only for agricultural purposes, but might also have marked times for tribute payment in line with Hirth's interpretation of the mouth consuming the quadripartite disk mirroring the four-part division of the solar year. Furthermore, in the Maya region the Trapeze-and-Ray headdress is often combined with other Teotihuacan-derived features, such as a Tlaloc or Storm God mask or face in the headdress, identified by goggles and a series of pointed fang-like teeth on Maya monuments showing rulers with weapons (e.g. Yaxchilán Lintel 25) or in a similar context on ceramic vessels (Robicsek and Hales 1981: 75, vessel 107). At Xochicalco, the goggles on the eyes might be an abbreviated allusion to Tlaloc, although there is an absence of fangs and weapons evoking military strength shown in the Maya region. This possible combination of solar and water symbolism might have underscored the elites' role not only as masters of time in astronomical and calendrical terms, but also in conjunction with agricultural cycles of rainfed or temporal farming complemented by tribute payment to supplement poor yields (cf. Hirth 2000: 19, 24, 27, 246ff). As such it would have reinforced the iconography of power discussed by Smith (2000b) without the need for the emphasis on bloodshed and warfare.

Upper talud

Seated Warriors. The upper *talud* is the most difficult to assess, given its fragmentary condition and its departure from the rigorously repeated pattern that prevails on the lower *talud* and *tablero*. The only repeated element is a seated warrior (Figure 12) – perhaps originally twelve figures – wearing a balloon headdress, probably with a row of projecting feathers above, long striated hair, and a plain panel descending at a slight diagonal, a mosaic or feathered shoulder covering, a straight bar ear ornament and wristlets, and holding a rectangular feathered shield, three arrows, and what might be a spearthrower (*atlatl*) or in one case a femur (Smith and Hirth 2000: 73). These armed figures appear only on the upper *talud*, although a similar costume was perhaps worn by the seated figure on the southern side of the stairway leading to the upper *talud* and a standing figure on each of the jambs to the space formed by the upper *talud* walls. Interspersed between these repeated figures is a panoply of glyphs, animals (eagles, canines), a woven mat, an idol, a headdress on different scales, not to mention smaller figures that might be prisoners, as well as an oversized head with a balloon headdress.

The balloon headdress is known in warrior contexts in the Cacaxtla murals and in the Maya Lowlands, such as from Piedras Negras, although a similar headdress also appeared on Metepec phase moldmade enthroned figurines from Teotihuacan (e.g. Berrin and Pasztory 1993: 231). At Teotihuacan the figures seem to be deity busts, for they seem to lack arms and legs, and do not seem to wear any military garb,[19] but at Xochicalco the Balloon Headdress seems to cite instead the military attire worn by rulers on Maya monuments,

19 Coggins (1983, 58) mentions an earlier version the a turban-like headdress worn by the Old God at Monte Albán, although its other features do not seem to coincide with the present context.

where the aim was to depict the ruler as a valiant warrior in powerful, non-local insignia. However, the figures on the Feathered Serpent Pyramid, like the others on the monument, are surrounded by an aura of anonymity. They too seem to be generic types more than identifiable individuals, despite the proliferation of glyphs around them.

Figure 12. Details of a warrior figure on the upper *talud*, Feathered Serpent Pyramid, Xochicalco (photo: Debra Nagao).

Actual conflict is not explicitly represented, yet potential violence remains latent, only hinted at through the presence of the seated armed figures, as well as smaller-scale figures identified as captives bound by rope and shown in profile (Smith 2000b: 75-76). Unlike the treatment of captives in Maya monuments, where they are humiliated, often shown with grotesque features or in contorted positions, or even worse at Cacaxtla, with their innards spilling out in a gory spectacle, the captives on the Feathered Serpent Pyramid are only subtly dehumanized. Their identity is suggested by their smaller scale and by being bound with ropes. In contrast, the repetition of the seated armed figure and the large-scale glyphs impose a grid of order. Through their sheer impassive presence, they impose order over any hint of the threat of potential conflict on the horizon. The imagery is a frank justification for the presence of warriors.[20]

20 An odd element is the oversized warrior head wearing the Balloon Headdress, with speech scrolls and what is apparently the L-shaped end of the spear-thrower in place of the glyphs on the north and south sides of the upper *talud*. He is the only one facing toward the left (south), for the other four regular-sized warriors face right (north).

Conclusions

The Feathered Serpent Pyramid is an iconic monument at Xochicalco for many reasons, not least of which is its impressive sculptural program enveloping the monument, its privileged location, and the complexity of its carefully planned iconographic program intended to convey a message of political stability and power. Based on the monument in the context of the city's sculptural tradition and comparative evidence from other parts of Mesoamerica, the final stage of the structure probably dates to the mid-eighth to ninth century, rather late in the city's short-lived existence (AD 650-900).

The multiple depictions of largely anonymous unarmed male figures of clear status and authority suggest a collective or corporate form of government and power at Xochicalco. Rifts in this system may have arisen when individuals or factions might have attempted to play a more protagonistic role. Monuments with glyphic inscriptions such as the three stelae have been interpreted as dedicated to specific militaristic rulers (Smith 2000a, 98ff), suggesting that at certain times individual leaders strove to stand out from a more corporate system. This might explain why monuments, such as the three stelae, were shattered and buried in a context suggesting rejection and destruction more than an honorary dedicatory interment (Sáenz 1961; 1964a). Instead, the Feathered Serpent Pyramid was designed to harness the cosmological power of origins first embodied in the Central Highlands in the Feathered Serpent Temple at the great metropolis of Teotihuacan hundreds of years earlier. Singling out the creature symbolizing the origins of time and space to frame the figures at Xochicalco endowed them with indisputable divine authority as the very foundation of the monument in a timeless setting. However, these allusions were recast in a veiled way, by rephrasing them through visual cues from the Maya style. The feathered serpent rendered with features from the Maya region is the preeminent focus of the lower *talud*, accompanied by seated figures that summon the idea of elite status through pose and attire, but who actually wear the *cipactli* headdress appropriated from the Teotihuacan monument. Although certain details – particularly on the lower *talud* and *tablero* – transmit an idea of admiration for the Maya, it is more a matter of the *idea* rather than the *form* that is embraced. It implies a process of awareness, but not necessarily one that involved Maya artists or even actual Maya objects as models; instead local copies or evocations of Maya pieces are what have been found at Xochicalco.

However, in more practical terms, the environmental realities of the site chosen by the individuals who established Xochicalco meant ongoing difficulties in producing enough food to sustain a swiftly growing population and made the payment of tribute a vital means of survival (Hirth 2000, 19, 24, 27, 246ff). Whereas the lower *talud* might be tied to the city's symbolic founders, the seated figures on the *tablero* might have embodied social groups or towns connected with tribute payments supporting the state's bureaucratic structure (Hirth 1989). To explain the site's explosive growth over a relatively short period of time, Hirth (1983, 296, 337; 2000, 87) has suggested resettlement, perhaps resulting from a regional coalition of political centers, whereas Ann

Cyphers (personal communication 1995) has suggested at least some of the population came to the city after the diaspora of Teotihuacan. Whatever the case, the quick rise of the settlement and the intensive labor required implied strong state control, which could have entailed behavior anywhere on the scale between cooperation to coercion. The Feathered Serpent Pyramid conveyed a range of messages to serve this scale. It called for unity under a cosmological power that went back to the very origins of time and space, while suggesting egalitarian participation in a system of tribute payments made to the state.

The concern for defensive features at the city supports the clear existence of militarism at Xochicalco, a theme conveyed in a measured way in the upper *talud* of the Feathered Serpent Pyramid. However, unlike Teotihuacan's no doubt memorable massive sacrifice of hundreds of victims for the dedication of its Feathered Serpent Pyramid, this does not seem to have been part of the ethos embraced at Xochicalco. Warriors and the threat of military control was a necessity, but it was not glorified to the same extent as it was at Teotihuacan, at least not in monumental arts and in the form of massive sacrificial victims in dedicatory offerings or deposits.

And this takes us back to the epigraph. The Feathered Serpent Pyramid was planned and executed as a monument to promote unity, grounded in indisputable cosmological time. In that sense, it evoked the past in an effort to ameliorate any conflicts that must have arisen in the course of the city's life. It lauded the cooperative efforts of polities valued as equal partners in contributing tribute for the continued existence of the city, while it also honored the role played by armed forces in maintaining order and discipline all couched in idealized calendrical time and portrayed by means of anonymous actors. Its purpose was to prevent anarchy stemming from rival factions, perhaps embodied by the Twin Pyramid, from being loosed upon the world. However, it alone was unable to placate the fury of those who overran the city. Blood flowed, monuments and ceremonial objects were shattered, fires were set in the city's core, household, ornamental, and ritual items were left strewn on the ground, as the city's residents fled for their lives.[21] Sadly, the center could not hold. Nevertheless, the Feathered Serpent Pyramid was miraculously – or perhaps fittingly – unscathed and sufficiently intact to continue to inspire the awe, admiration, and curiosity of many others through the centuries.

21 Garza Tarazona and González Crespo (1995, 100); González Crespo *et al.* (1994, 54, 86; Hirth 2000, 97).

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